

Black history, all the year long

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full-time, professional arts agency. "We let people know this was a stable organization looking to be around for the long term, one that warranted the support from the public and private sectors," said Thomas.

The foundation has three programs. Its performance series, "On Stage in New Jersey," features 13 artists. More than 30 performers and groups make up its second program, "Black Culture On Tour in America." Instead of touring only in New Jersey, the program is seen throughout the country and Canada. It represents African-American literature, dance, theatre, film, and music be it jazz, choral or gospel.

The foundation also sponsors an Artists-In-Schools program designed to instill in young people an early appreciation for the performing arts while enriching their understanding of African-American culture.

Thomas's work has not gone unnoticed. In Oct. 1988, he was named to the National Task Force for Presenting and Touring the Performing Arts, founded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

He also was named of one of 46 people to participate in Leadership New Jersey, a year-long program to help people understand how government works. Thomas also is on the board of directors of the Newark Collaboration Group, a nonprofit organization contributing to the growth of the city.

Through a recent grant by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the Woodson Foundation is engaged on a long-range planning project.

"We're interested in institutionalizing the foundation," said Thomas. "We want it to survive beyond our lifetimes, to continue to be a resource for African-American culture and the performing arts for institutions throughout America."

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Celebrating the black experience all year

By KEVIN GONZALEZ
Courier-Post Staff

To Philip Thomas, Black History month is an ethnic celebration like St. Patrick's Day or Columbus Day, only a lot longer.

Thomas, president of the Carter G. Woodson Foundation, one of New Jersey's largest African-American cultural organizations, also believes in celebrating black contributions to this country the other 11 months in the year.

"It is the goal of this organization to document and perpetuate the impact African-Americans have made to the mainstream culture," he said.

The 41-year-old Newark resident helped found the organization in 1974 when he was a sophomore theatre major at Montclair State College. Its name then was Black Arts Achievement.

Thomas, with four other students, started the organization because he felt there weren't many activities offered on campus drawn from the black experience. Its goal was bringing them to all students.

In 1980, while working as an arts development service coordinator for the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Thomas re-organized Black Arts Achievement, changing its name in honor of Woodson.

"He is known as the father of black history," he said. Woodson, the second black man to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard, founded the Association for the Study of African-American Life and Culture in Washington, D.C. in the 1920s. He also was instrumental in bringing about Negro History Week in 1926, the forerunner of Black History Month.

The goals of the renamed, Newark-based organization were the same but it broke loose of the confines of the college campus and targeted the entire state. Initially, its focus was on events for Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Black History Month.

"There wasn't an onslaught of people throwing money at us and offering services," recalled Thomas. "But we received a great deal of support from the audiences we were trying to reach, people eager to see the positive values of the African-American experience presented

through art, history and culture."

In 1982, its first year of budgeted programs, the Woodson Foundation received its initial major grant, \$2,500 from the Black United Fund of New Jersey.

The foundation's budget that year was just \$12,000. Its total staff was one and a half volunteers, including Thomas.

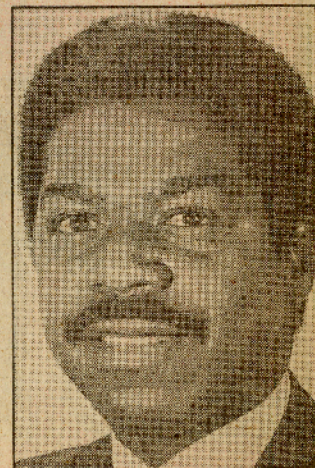
This year's budget is \$300,000. The foundation has four full-time staffers and two part-time employees.

It receives grants from, among others, AT&T, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce, Public Service Electric and Gas, Bally's Park Place Casino, the Prudential Foundation and the Adolph Coors Company.

The breakthrough year was 1985.

"I took the plunge," said Thomas, who quit his full-time job as grants analyst with the Newark Board of Education to devote all his energy to the foundation.

From 1986 to 1988, the foundation became a



PHILIP THOMAS
... heads Woodson Foundation

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